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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002160

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SUBJECT: ISCI LEADER ABDUL AZIZ AL-HAKIM ENCOURAGING ON
SFA/SOFA

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary. In a July 1 meeting, Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) leader Syed Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and the Ambassador discussed SFA/SOFA negotiations, provincial elections, and post-operations reconstruction. Hakim expressed support for reaching a strategic framework agreement (SFA) and said he was satisfied with PM Maliki's handling of negotiations. He expressed enthusiasm about provincial elections in general but sounded a non-committal, cautious note on election law timelines, saying he "would like elections to happen this year according to a new election law." Hakim pressed for more assistance to improve electricity, water, and fuel services, and also warned Ambassador Crocker that many of his supporters increasingly believe that the U.S. tacitly supports the Mujahadeen-e-Khalq (MEK), creating animosity among Shia. Although reportedly in the late stages of terminal lung cancer, Hakim appeared relatively strong. End Summary.

SFA/SOFA Negotiations

¶2. (S/NF) After returning from a day-long trip to the holy Shia city of Samarra -- which Hakim said was his first visit in 20 years, made possible only recently because of the improving security situation -- Hakim listened attentively as Ambassador Crocker briefed the way forward on the U.S.-Iraqi strategic partnership. The Ambassador stressed that we are close to an agreement on an SFA with a bridging protocol that will address the goal of bringing Iraq out of UN Chapter 7 authority, while noting that SOFA negotiations will be a longer process. He added that we will work to finalize the protocol by the end of July, in advance of the election season in both the U.S. and Iraq. Hakim responded that "we have always been enthusiastic" about the agreement, emphasizing that getting out of Chapter 7 was the most important point of order. He expressed full confidence in Prime Minister Maliki's ability to negotiate the agreement, saying he is "personally comfortable with how negotiations are going," while noting the need to communicate with other religious authorities on the details. While Hakim reiterated that Iraqi sovereignty was a primary goal, no specific sovereignty-related issues (i.e. immunity of troops) were discussed.

Provincial Elections

¶3. (S/NF) Ambassador Crocker emphasized to Hakim the need for the COR to pass an election law without delay, and for ISCI and the governing coalition to play a positive role in expediting the process. Hakim expressed enthusiasm about the provincial elections, remarking that many parties and voters have registered and that he expects ISCI to do well. He was less forthcoming about passing an election law promptly, saying that he would "back any good effort by our brothers" to pass a law and that he expected elections to take place later this year. He also offered his personal opinion that Kirkuk should have elections by the same process as the rest

of the country, though he knew this would not work politically. He also indicated that progress had been made in bringing the Sunni Arab Iraqi National Accord (Tawafuq) back to the coalition. Hakim also noted press coverage on television earlier in the day about Tawafuq coming to agreement with the government, saying skeptically, "I hope it is true."

Post-Conflict Reconstruction

¶4. (S/NF) Hakim pointed out several times that Iraq's primary problem right now is the lack of basic services for electricity, water, and fuel. He asked for more American assistance and expertise in these areas, and also asked about the possibility of a ship docking in Basra that could provide electricity. Ambassador Crocker emphasized that we have been working with the Iraqi government on all of these issues. He also reminded Hakim that the GOI, while continuously improving performance, has not carried out effective post-operations reconstruction programs in Basra and Sadr City, despite having funds available. Hakim agreed that more has to be done by the GOI in Basra and Amarah, while sounding optimistic about prospects for reconstruction.

The Iran Card: MEK

¶5. (S/NF) Late in the meeting, Hakim raised the Mujahadeen-e-Khalq, suggesting that they are growing in strength and arguing that an increasing number of Shia Iraqis believe they are backed by the U.S. He conceded the

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Ambassador's point that the U.S. has listed MEK as a terrorist organization, but protested that MEK uses its protected status to hold regular events and festivals against the government of Iran. Hakim further inquired about Iraqis held in military detention centers, whom he believes are being held unjustly. Ambassador Crocker emphasized in his response that many detainees have been released, the number of detainees is constantly dropping, and that Iraqis are part of the evaluative process.

¶6. (S/NF) Comment: Suffering from terminal lung cancer, Hakim looks thinner and weaker than he did six months ago. However, for a man often reported to be close to death, Hakim looked relatively healthy, moving briskly without assistance and fully engaged in the conversation despite being at the end of a long day on the road. On some current issues, such as SFA/SOFA, he did not display full command of all the nuances of the topic, suggesting that some key leadership duties have already been passed to his son Amar al-Hakim or other deputies. Amar was not in the meeting, but Hakim's other son Muhsin was present along with one staff member.

End Comment.

CROCKER